

# Biological attack: Don't panic, know facts

By SSGT. Eric Grill  
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**LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas --** Officials from the 59th Medical Wing here want people to know that despite recent accounts of anthrax cases being reported since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, there is no reason to panic.

While people know how to react to terrorists' bombs, people do not know how to deal with diseases, said Maj. Caroline De Witt, acting chief of infectious diseases for the 59th MDW at Wilford Hall Medical Center here.

"We are here to reassure people that many of these diseases are treatable if caught early," De Witt said. "The military has been studying possible agents of bioterrorism for a very long time, and we've had years of training to prepare for events like a biological attack."

Education is the key to abating some of the fears that people may have about infectious diseases, De Witt said.

People have been going to military surplus stores and buying gas masks because of that fear, but De Witt said biological agents like anthrax have inoculation periods, and "gas masks won't apply."

While there is a nationwide concern about some sort of biological attack by terrorists, De Witt said that both civilian and military medical officials are ready, and the nation has spent years developing a national pharmaceutical stockpile.

Any of the military services have detailed readiness plans and are able to augment public readiness officials if needed, De Witt said.

Some of the diseases medical officials are watching for include anthrax, smallpox and plague, De Witt said. Smallpox was eradicated worldwide and routine vaccination was stopped around 1980. Therefore, many people remain susceptible to the disease.

Anthrax is produced by the bacteria "Bacillus anthracis." A tough protective coat allows the bacteria to survive for decades as spores.

Anthrax is dangerous because it is highly lethal if not caught in time. It is one of the easiest biological agents to manufacture and relatively easy to develop as a weapon. Anthrax spores, while extremely difficult to aerosolize as a weapon, can be easily spread over a large area and easily stored.

The disease also has an incubation period of one to six days between exposure and symptoms, officials said.

Because of this, De Witt said, "There is reason for a heightened sense of alert, but be reassured that panic is not needed. Very few (biological) agents can be transferred human to human, and many of the diseases are benign and can be treated easily, if caught early."

Anyone who suspects that they have come into contact with a suspicious substance should



report it to authorities immediately, De Witt said. The earlier it is reported the better chances of determining what that substance is.

"Professionals doing the field tests will let a person know whether they've been exposed or not," she said.

"Field tests can be done quickly and easily to determine if a person was exposed to a biological agent," De Witt said. But, it takes about 24 to 48 hours to confirm what that biological agent is."

While it sounds like a good idea to have a stockpile of medicines in a person's medicine cabinet, De Witt said she advises against it. These medicines have side effects that can be dangerous if not taken properly; taken by a child; or taken by someone who is pregnant.

For more information about anthrax, go online to the DOD anthrax Web site.

## Pre-planning for redeployment alleviates hardships

By Capt. Bob Farkas  
Tanker Air Lift Control Element

We are almost ready to wrap things up with another highly successful Bright Star exercise.

It's normal to start throwing things into bins, boxes, and pallet containers after a long deployment anticipating the trip home to be with family and friends. Everyone is ready to take a breather and relax after working long hours in Force Protection Condition Delta, however, this is not the time to power-down.

The redeployment phase of an exercise

is normally the most work intensive portion of any deployment and will make or break a successful operation. There are several steps that must be accomplished in order to prepare each unit's piece of equipment, vehicle, and pallet for shipment on Air Mobility Command airlift.

Each item must be properly packed, documented, marked and weighed with an aircraft load plan in order to pass strict Agricultural and US/Egyptian Customs inspections, the Army's Arrival Departure Airfield Control Group cargo clearance requirements, and the Tanker Airlift Control Element's Joint Inspection process.

Each unit is required to be self-sufficient

and know how to prepare their own cargo for deployment and redeployment. However, there are several agencies that will help the process go a little smoother.

If people need some technical assistance in preparing their cargo, want to know what type of documentation is required, or get a little familiarization training on load planning, contact the Transportation Management Office at Ext. 1125, TALCE at Ext. 5611 or 5612, or ADACG at Ext. 5614. The sooner people prepare for redeployment, the less headache they'll have when it comes time to load their equipment and the greater chance of the leaving on time.

